3t Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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Social Environment

In the Santal tracts mentioned above, they live side by side with the general population and although Santal hamlets are separate affairs, they cannot be said to be cut off from the rest of the world. The times are gone when the Santals receded into the back-woods to live in their old world of songs, dances and drinks. The most potent of the outside influences is the Christian missionary. Throughout the Santal Parganas and other places these missions are scattered. They educate the Santal in rudiments of modern knowledge, treat him, when ill, in hospitals of their own and look after the lepers in leper colonies. The Missionaries confess that they are out to preach and teach the Gospel of Salvation in Jesus Christ, but the indirect result of their educational activities can easily be seen in a changed angle of vision in the tribe.

Secondly, in some places, notably in Rajmahal and Dinajpur, Hindu Missions have opened their branches. These organisations seek to 'reclaim' the aboriginal to the Hindu fold, acting on the theory that the Santals are already Hindus as they follow a religion of Hindusthan. The religious workers of these institutions, who style themselves as "Missionaries,"—a novel feature no doubt—try to infuse into the Santal ideals of clean living, eating pure food and thus gradually win them over to worship the Hindu

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Board of the district, and from the beginning the mission sought to establish primary schools in the villages. Openings were found in centres either where some people had been baptized or where some of the influential villagers desired to see a school for the education of their children. The early period corresponded with an awareness, at least among a section of the Santals, that their boys should learn to read and write in order to be able to protect themselves; they were frequently discouraged by caste Hindus, most of whom in country areas may have felt quite sincerely that they were actuated by the highest motives. An old Santal related: "The *Deko* say to us, 'You cow-eaters, if you learn to read and write you will go blind', and many of our people, being simple, believe them." And so they turned readily to the missions who wished them to be educated. The government also found it convenient to rely on the help of missions and has made extensive educational work possible through grants. In the Bankura district Santal children can pass from their village schools to middle schools at Sarenga, and some have subsequently been able to go to High School and a mission College in the district town. At Sarenga a training school for village teachers trains the young men who staff the primary schools of the area. In spite of these efforts there has been disappointingly small progress towards literacy among the Santals. They remain largely indifferent to the type of education provided, for even in the remotest village the idea that the village school is merely a stepping-stone to further education has become deep rooted, and so the majority of the villagers cannot discover that the school is relevant to their needs. It is thought sufficient if two or three of the villagers are literate, for they can be relied on to help their illiterate companions. In the Bankura district the number of non-Christian girls who have attended the schools is very small, and none at all have so far attended the boarding school at Sarenga, although Christian and non-Christian boys mingle happily in the boys' school.

Medical work has likewise been prominent. The churches, which report to the Santal Christian Council, are responsible for seven general hospitals, five leper hospitals and a number of clinics. At Sarenga the arrival of a doctor in 1914 heralded the development of a hospital that now occupies a commanding site and brings healing to many thousands of patients, both Santal and non-Santal, every year. It is the centre of a nurses' training school where a number of Santal girls have qualified as trained nurses. While the hospital receives as many patients as can be

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dealt with, it is probable that the chief limitation to its usefulness is still to be found in the ideas of the people, who regard it too often as a last resort. A further handicap is that it is a great upheaval in the life of a family if they have to take a patient to hospital, involving themselves in severe economic loss. Nevertheless, the influence of the hospital grows steadily and chiefly by the advocacy of those who have themselves been patients.

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One significant movement of reform within the Santal community showed clearly how the influence of missions has been working. It was an apparently spontaneous movement among the Santals of Midnapore and Bankura, but it coincided with a period of nationalist activity in the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930, from which the Santals held aloof. In spite of their detachment, they were ripe to listen to propaganda. In the Sarenga area the three most prominent leaders had all received their education at the boys' boarding school and they had subsequently been trained there as village school teachers. At the time none of them was a Christian and neither in public nor in private did they indicate that their thoughts had ever turned towards accepting the Christian faith. These three men gathered round them a small band of helpers who, with great enthusiasm and at considerable sacrifice, went round the countryside and summoned mass meetings of the Santals to hear them. At some of the gatherings the missionary at Sarenga was invited to preside and to speak, largely it seemed because they were anxious for the government to realize that the movement was in no way directed against established authority. They urged the following reforms: firstly, a general tightening of the authority of the village officials in order to safeguard the basis of family life and reduce the number of broken marriages—the officials were urged to set the tone of Santal life by their example; secondly, abstention from drinking spirits and from drinking rice beer, except for ritual purposes and at festivals; thirdly, the prohibition of the large gatherings where women danced in public so that many Hindus gathered to watch them. Dancing should be carried on only in their own villages. This modest programme roused considerable excitement and opposition. The reformers discovered that the elders did not like to be told what was their duty, and the mass of unthinking youths became resentful. For the most part the reformers relied on persuasion, and at several meetings they succeeded in having resolutions passed in favour of the reforms. They were goaded into direct action when they saw that in spite of resolutions public opinion did not favour the